PLANETA SINCLAIR

The ZX Spectrum fanzine

May 2024 Special edition

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F. Albuquerque * P. Wheelhouse
Formula One * WEC Le Mans

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Editorial

Motorsports and the ZX Spectrum

Gaming may be a form of dreaming, or a form of living the illusion. Some say it's an escape from reality, while for others it can be an imitation of life. And for many of us, the ZX Spectrum was the first realistic gateway to imitate the feats of our sporting heroes, albeit from the comfort of our chairs. From the beginning, motorsport gaming led the way in video game innovation, with the Speccy bringing us some unforgettable racing titles: Chequered Flag, Pole Position, Formula One, Nigel Mansell's Grand Prix, Super Hang-On, Enduro Racer, WEC Le Mans, 3D Stock Car, Super Monaco GP, among others.

In this special edition of our Fanzine we pay tribute to two iconic motorsport games of the Spectrum golden era: Formula One (famous multiplayer F1 management) and WEC Le Mans (probably the best racing arcade conversion for the ZX). We also are honoured to have a first-person account of games development for the ZX Spectrum, penned by Peter Wheelhouse (co-author of Formula One, from CRL) and an interview with Filipe Albuquerque (Speccy fan, gamer, FIA World Endurance Champion, and winner of the 24 Hours of Le Mans).

This fanzine is also set to launch alongside the SYNERGY event at the LOAD ZX Museum, which has a strong focus on motorsports and the ZX Spectrum. For this thematic within the event, the special guests are Peter Wheelhouse, Clem Chambers (CRL founder), and Filipe Albuquerque, along with Portuguese developers who created MODs of Formula One. And, last but not the least, the event includes a thrilling WEC Le Mans gaming tournament.

From the precision of simulators to the excitement of arcade classics, motorsport gaming on the ZX Spectrum has given us countless hours of enjoyment. Now is the time to come together in SYNERGY, with this Fanzine, to celebrate the games, the legends, the memories and the fun that continues to bring us joy today.

Jorge P.

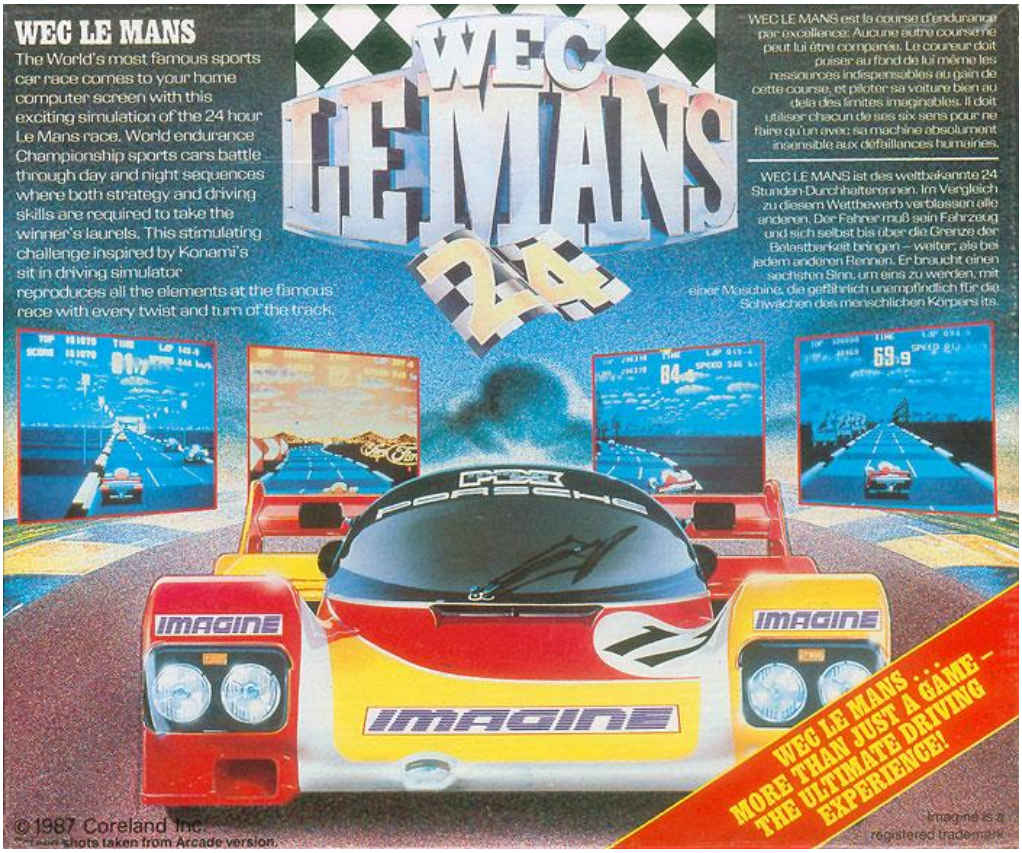
Name: WEC Le Mans
Publishing company: Imagine Software
Authors: Mike Lamb, John Mullins, Jonathan Dunn, Bill Harbison, Alick Morrall
Release year: 1989
Genre: Race'n'chase
Keys: Redefinable
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair
Memory: 48K / 128K

We know that in the past Planeta Sinclair had already done a (mini) review of WEC Le Mans, however, it is justified to pick up this game again, if only because we are in the middle of the Synergy 2024 event in Cantanhede, dedicated, among others things, to motorsport, with very relevant people related to the motorsport scene visiting and participating in the Museum's activities. Whether nationally (Filipe Albuquerque, for example) or internationally (Peter Wheelhouse and Clem Chambers)...

Furthermore, the game is back in fashion, with WEC Le Mans tournaments in progress and streaming of the races, thanks to Jorge P., who, taking advantage of the good experiences with streaming Formula One and Match Day 2, replicated the approach for this game.

But let's get back to what brings us here today. For many years, WEC Le Mans was the race'n'chase of choice, at least for us. May Chase H.Q. fans forgive us, and there are many out there, but we always liked this game more, which recreates the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Not that Chase H.Q. is not good, on the contrary, but while in the latter we are faced with an (excellent) action/arcade game, which puts us behind the wheel of a powerful car, WEC Le Mans tries to recreate very closely the famous circuit, entering more into the category of simulators, even just having the keys to turn, accelerate, brake and change gear (there are only two gears).

Inevitable, and sometimes not consensual, is the fact that the track is always the same. Detractors will say that there is little variability or diversity, that the game becomes monotonous after a while, etc., etc.. We understand the feeling, but we don't share it. The way we see it, this game is a true simulation, and since you are recreating a famous track, it is inevitable that the circuit will be the same for each of the four laps. In fact, just like in real sport, the ultimate objective will be to achieve perfection in driving, in order to complete the race in the set time (the position in which you finish is not relevant, in fact, you don't even know the position in the race).



We agree that perhaps the task could be made a little more difficult for the driver, who, after a few hours of training, will be able to complete the race without any major problems. Perhaps if our driver's position in the race could be added, that would certainly give a few more reasons to increase his longevity in the game. In any case, considering that the basic game version runs in only 48K, it seems like we couldn't ask for much more.

But don't think that the game is that easy, either. Although most of the curves can be done at top speed, without braking (pay attention to a certain point in stage 2 of the circuit), and the first lap is almost a training session, the real difficulties arise when we have to negotiate the road with three or four cars at the same time, especially when they have the terrible habit of putting themselves in front of us when we are preparing to overtake them (it almost seems intentional). The collision system is still generous, working in our favor and avoiding too many spins, which sooner or later we're going to do. When this happens, we see our car in all its glory.

The best tactic to finish WEC Le Mans, and assuming that we memorize the circuit and the "hot spots", will be to be able to predict the behavior of the other drivers. It is essential to use the brakes when two or three vehicles appear in front of us, sometimes even letting them advance a little in order to free up some space on the road, and only overtaking them when we are sure that we are not going to collide with them, or spread out into the ditch, or, even worse, run into obstacles that are off the road, always placed in the most inconvenient spots.

The sound during the race could also be a little better, indeed. On the 128K version, the engine's roar becomes really monotonous after a while. On the other hand, it is indicative of the speed at which we are driving and when we need to change gear. Fortunately, the vehicle's acceleration is brutal and after starting, the ideal point to upshift is quickly reached, without wasting precious seconds.

So, in our opinion, and even taking into account two or three points that could be a little better, WEC Le Mans is a tremendous simulator, with outstanding gameplay, which will certainly provide many moments of fun to anyone who dares to accelerate in this powerful car. If it's the best race'n'chase ever, we don't dare say so, but even if it isn't, it will be close, without a doubt...

Playability	
Graphics	
Sound	
Originality	
Longevity	
Addictiveness	

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Filipe Albuquerque's interview

Planeta Sinclair: What was your inspiration to enter the world of motorsport? And did video games have any bearing on this?

Filipe Albuquerque: The passion and inspiration for motorsport clearly came from my father, who had a taste for it since he was young and then wanted to introduce me and my brothers to karting. And then it also helped a lot to be the time of Ayrton Senna's great F1 races.

The games appeared at the same time that I started go-karting. I was born in 85, so the Spectrum had already arrived at my house earlier and I remember playing it in 1990, when I was 5 years old. I didn't understand the significance of it, my brother was more of an expert at that time, but I grew up with both passions: motorsport and gaming.

PS: What experiences did you have with the ZX Spectrum and other types of computers in your youth?

FA: I had great experiences at that time. We started with the Spectrum, where it took longer to get into the game than it did to actually, I think, play the game. There were three of us, I remember that me, my sister and my brother had to share the keyboard. I could only play when my brother was present and he could connect everything, because I remember I couldn't set up the Spectrum. Then, later, I moved on to other systems, like the Nintendos, the megadrives, and then, later, I remember my father buying us the regular SEGA and then the SEGA CD. These consoles were revolutionary, with unbelievable graphics. It's funny that, whenever a game came out, the graphics were unbelievable, as it still happens today, but then when a person looks back, we realize that the other previous games were poor in this aspect. And so I grew up with lots of games, and I still play games today.

PS: Were you more interested in games, programming or both?

FA: As a matter of fact, I have never been fascinated by programming. I was much more into playing, for the more lively part of the thing, and having a racing or shooting character. This has always captivated me a lot.

PS: What are your favourite games on the ZX Spectrum?

FA: I don't remember many of the games anymore, but I remember Batty (I was watching recently, remembering a little). The one that is a platform and sends the balls up and they bounce there. I recall playing with my brother on numerous occasions.

There was also a basketball game that I played a lot called World Series Basketball. And then those shooting games with spaceships where you always kept pressing to fire shots.

PS: Having a professional career in motorsport, do you still have time for games? And what kind? Do you like motorsports games or do you prefer to play other kinds of games to change the subject?

FA: I only stopped playing for some time in my life, but then I started playing again. I always thought playing was a brutal, great abstraction of the stress, of a lot of the pressure I have before the races. And so I never stopped, I still play today, almost like a child and therefore I never lost the interest.

Lately I've been playing more Call of Duty, I came back to it during the pandemic. It ends up being very funny, because what's great about Call of Duty is that I can be playing with my teammates, one is in Switzerland, another in the United States, one of my engineers was even in Canada and we were playing all together and talking.

In other words, it has a very good social part too. We spend time together, chat about various topics, almost like team building. And then I really like playing iRacing.

PS: You have already won the 24 Hours of Daytona for three times, you were also Champion of the FIA World Endurance Championship and won the 24h of Le Mans (LMP2), among many other successes. What have been the most delightful achievements of your career so far?

FA: It's true, I've already won some things, but it's clear that we have to set new goals and win those races that we really want. And in racing we are only as good as our last race. I hate the feeling of not knowing when I'm going to win the next one, so I always want my last race to be a victory.

Sometimes I forget that I was already world champion or that I already won Le Mans, so I want to win the next one. Joana, my wife, sometimes reproaches me a little because I live a little bit in the future, with the ambition of wanting to earn more and focus on the next goal, and sometimes I forget what I've already done in the past.

PS: In 2023 you were ranked 2nd place in the IMSA Endurance championship in the USA. What are the prospects for this year, 2024 (even despite some mechanical problems affecting your team in the first races)?

FA: In the last 3 years I started the championship very well, but always finished second. This year is going in the worst possible way, not due to the drivers, but because of issues with the car and various other factors. It is what it is...
So now the objective is to win races and classify as far ahead as possible. Then, closer to the end, we'll see where we stand and try to win the championship, because this championship has been eluding me for many years.

PS: You are going to participate in the 24h of Le Mans in 2024. To prepare, do you use any type of video game, other than the most reliable one, which is, obviously, the WEC Le Mans game on the ZX Spectrum?

FA: (laughs) I haven't been using the Spectrum lately, because I can't put my setup there. (laughter)
I prepare a little, I try to play more on the track, in the simulator. And I once heard something very interesting from Mario Andretti, which is: if you prepare for a particular track, then it means that for all the others, you are preparing poorly.
Therefore, the preparation is very similar to other races and I just prepare the track a little, in the simulator, and the rest falls into place.

PS: If you could choose, without regard to financing or other constraints, what career objective would you like to achieve?

FA: I won't hide it, my goal would be, at some point, to reach Formula 1, I would have liked to have been there. I even drove a Formula 1, which I loved. And, at the end of the day, a driver always wants to drive the fastest car and also the most prestigious one. And clearly Formula 1 is the fastest there is and the most prestigious level.

I feel that I am also very happy in the Endurance, because one thing that Formula 1 drivers don't know (because of course they are there, they never came to the Endurance), is that by sharing the car with another driver, with whom we later become friends, the feeling of sharing and teamwork is even stronger. And therefore, when we win, I think it is much better to share this happiness of victory, than when we are alone.

Or even when we lose, because we never lose alone, the other teammate is there to help us get through what didn't go so well and we help each other. There you go, we are humans and humans were made to socialize, to share that happiness together.

PS: Do you like computers? And how do you see IT influencing the world of racing throughout your career?

FA: I really like it, I've always really liked computers, I'm always very fascinated. I've also always really liked games, and of course that helps. I think it's funny to have a good computer, with some interesting components, but I've never been one to try to write code.

I've always been busier at races and then I can't do everything. I really like computers, but not the programming part, I don't know how to do it, but, who knows, maybe one day...

PS: What video games do you like the most, both to prepare for races and to relax?

FA: I like shooting games, in the first person, but also in the third person. I really liked Metal Gear on Playstation, I really like Call of Duty, I also played Counter Strike a lot in the past. Regarding motorsports, I like iRacing, I play it a lot. As it's a game with tracks, each lap takes a minute or two minutes, and I easily spend three or four hours playing. (laughter)

PS: Finally, is there anything you would like to share with the readers about your story with the ZX Spectrum?

FA: The memories I have were the memories of the novelty at the time, and remembering being a little child, and looking at a television, turning it all on and how revolutionary and fantastic this was! Therefore, today I keep it as one of the good childhood memories with my brothers, which I loved. My brother was the expert in the house, the one who understood that and had patience. I think my connection to the Spectrum is more the memory I had with my brothers, which I keep, and it was the beginning, let's say, of games.

Today, when I see a game and realize that the graphics are much better, or when I think about a previous game that had terrible graphics, I look back at the Spectrum and feel like it's a classic. I can only say good things about the Spectrum, because we are talking about many years ago.

Spectrum Games by Peter Wheelhouse & George Munday

George Munday & I first met at our secondary school, Leyton County High School, and remained close friends until George died at his villa in Villefranche in the south of France in January 2009. I started at Leyton County High School in 1955 but George, who had been to private prep school, did not arrive until 1957. Outside of school, we were avid pinball players, going to local cafes & coffee shops to play them most evenings; later George bought a refurbished pinball machine & had it installed in a spare room at his home in Loughton. We were both early players of the new electronic games machines in pubs & cafes, such as "Pong", "Asteroids", "Moon Lander" and others, often traveling across London to try out new ones that we had heard of.

As we matured, started our careers & got married, playing games was an ongoing interest and we would often get out the board games at the end of dinner parties at each other's homes, sometimes playing through the night; one of our favourite board games was "Careers". This interest was not an exclusive obsession like many electronic activities nowadays; theatre, cinema, dining, traveling, motor sports, skiing & other social & leisure activities also took up our spare time.

We both got Sinclair Spectrums quite soon after their release; I think for both of us, they were birthday presents from our respective partners at the time. With our partners, we played many of the games on the Spectrum of which "Manic Miner", "Football Manager" & "New Zealand Story" stick in the memory. When we visited each other at home, we would play these together, taking turns on the games with the others spectating & offering unwelcome advice & derision to the one playing.

Quite soon, George & I agreed that a significant deficiency of all games was that they were targeted at individual players. There was nothing that allowed multiple players to enjoy & compete together in the same game. We decided that, if there was nothing that we could buy to allow multi-players, we would write our own game. We adopted our favourite board game, "Careers" as a rough model. This was started purely as a hobby for us & our families, and we had no intent to try to sell it to others. At this time, George was living in Loughton, Essex and I was living in Chiswick, West London; our working lives were even further separated. George was a partner in a legal (conveyancing solicitors) practice in Woodford & Wanstead whilst I was a contract IT Project Manager based in Reading.

George had no experience of writing computer software and, although I had been a programmer & system designer in the late 1960s & early 1970s, this had been on very large mainframes and a decade in the past. We started writing the game in BASIC and would test out early versions of the game with our partners at weekends. Initially we hoped to replicate all options in "Careers" but very soon realized the memory limitations of the Spectrum would constrain this ambition. We also found that BASIC was far too slow for the graphic elements of the game and so decide to build modules in Z80 Assembly.

Being so geographically separated gave a few logistic problems. We split the game into separate elements; George's main focus was on the graphical elements and my main focus was on the inner workings of the game. We defined a simple way in which the elements would interact & designed a standard interface between modules & elements. This allowed us to develop components of the games independently & asynchronously. We investigated getting new versions of our modules to each other electronically but the infrastructure to do so at that time was very poor & expensive; I think "Prestel" was an option that we tried and abandoned. In the end, we had to rely on Royal Mail as the standard communication medium, sending cassette tapes to each other, and getting together at weekends to do closer integration.

After a while, we ended up with a fairly well-rounded game and had widened the playing audience to a few other friends who played Spectrum games. More as a bit of a lark than anything else, we decided to see if it would be possible to sell the game to others. At this time, I was fairly intensely absorbed in running a major project for a Mainframe manufacturer and George took on the task of finding an outlet. He met up with Clement Chambers, who had founded CRL, which at that time had branched out to produce & sell games for the Spectrum. George showed Clement our game, which we had named "£sd", and he thought that it may be a good addition to his portfolio of games. George dealt with all the contract agreements and took the lead in pulling together the packaging of the game with Clement, which was released under the CRL branding.

It was quite a thrill when we got the first commercial copies of our game and when we saw it advertised, with our names, in the popular magazines of the time. Although we both had successful careers in our respective fields, completely separate from the games market, and despite the fact that we, approaching our 40th birthdays, were "old fogies" compared to almost everyone that was involved in the computer games market at that time, we both thought it a bit special that we had pulled it all together. "£sd" did not make a significant impact on the burgeoning games market (I

think that we got paid royalties for the sale of 75 copies) but it did enthuse us to do something more and the idea of "Formula 1" was born from our love of motor racing & the stimulus of actually getting something published.

George discussed this with Clement, who said that he thought that it would do well. We decided that the game had to be entirely in Z80 Assembly and that it had to have management, interactive graphics & separate "fun" elements and, most importantly, be playable both for multiple players and by a single individual, which was quite unique at the time. We followed the same approach for "Formula 1" as we did for "£sd" by dividing up the structure into separate components, designing a clear interface as to how modules would work together and the main focus for each of us, George concentrating on the Graphic elements & me on the inner workings.

By this time, Spectrum had introduced the Microdrive storage device, which we used for the source code and which we would post to each other. Initially this felt like a major performance improvement over the cassette tapes but, as we built up the size of the code, one could go out to make a cup of coffee while the code was being compiled & assembled into an executable program. It was a major frustration to get a new executable, start a test run and then hit a bug; I know that I spent a major effort "desk checking" new source code before building a new version in order to avoid this frustration. I think that the final version of Formula 1 source code was comprised of 30 separate Microdrives.

Another frustration was the prints that you could get from the Spectrum. The only printer available at the time was a Thermal printer, which used rolls of special fairly narrow paper. The paper would always try to roll itself back up while you were trying to work through the code. On more than one occasion, when trying to find a bug, the floor in my living room would be completely covered in strips of thermal printer paper held flat with various weights and I would be crawling over them trying to follow the code. There were few software development aids then, basically a source editor and a compiler/assembler with no simulation/emulation tools; the only way to check an executable was to build a complete version, play it, watch what happened, try to guess where it failed and then work through the source code prints. To avoid causing each other unnecessary aggravation, George & I would go to extreme lengths to test out our own individual components before sending a new version to each other.

George had an uncle who was a senior member of Cosworth in the 80s & this enabled him to make contact

with some F1 teams for research. I was not involved in this but recall that George spoke to at least 1 team manager, Ron Dennis, I think. I do recall that Peter Collins was sent a copy of the pre-production version by Clement, and he made some adverse comments about the realism of the game. I was never sure whether this was because he missed the point that it was a game not a real life simulation or whether he was peeved that he was not consulted in the development stage. Does not really matter one way or another, anyway.

We did go to the Monaco GP that year (1984), partly justified as research but mostly just because we wanted to. That was the year when the race was stopped, purportedly because of the torrential rain after a lot of drivers crashing. We were watching from the slopes of the hill below the castle to the west of the circuit and it was a nightmare in the rain & mud. We could not notice any difference in the rain before & after the stoppage, but it seemed significant to us that the race was stopped very soon after Senna had passed Prost meaning that the result was taken from the end of the previous lap, when Prost was still leading. Because it was stopped before halfway, Prost only got half points, but it still enabled him to win the World Championship by a small margin at the end of the year.

When we developed "£sd", we were quite relaxed about it because we had no demands, other than our own, to get it finished. For "Formula 1", Clement wanted to get it released in time for Xmas so this put some time pressures on us over the Summer & early Autumn, but we got it done to meet Clement's timescales.

There was a bit of a problem with people hacking Spectrum games by copying the executable from the cassette & then modifying the assembly code. I decided to embed some code in the load screen itself that performed the actual load of the executable and modified some of the actual game code. I recall that CRL received a letter from a group of hackers complimenting us on the technique, which fooled them for a short while but which they then were able to crack. I think these hackers were mostly interested in the challenge of hacking and to change the code to allow them to cheat in games.

Clement decided that he wanted to offer a prize as part of his marketing strategy for the game. I think that the prize was cash, possibly around £500, that it was to be given to the first person to secure the World Championship at the highest difficulty level (5) in the game. I buried a special code in the game that was only revealed when someone did this.

One of the features of the game was that random, & not so random, events could happen to a car during a race;

for example, a puncture, engine failure, crashing etc. The players could influence this by spending their budgets wisely and by choosing the right tyres for the conditions, which would reduce the probability of an incident in a race. One of the elements of the difficulty levels was that the higher the level, the higher the probability of events happening and, to make it more competitive for multiple players, a player's position in a season's championship also affected the probability of an event happening; the higher your position in the championship, the more likely you were to suffer an event. This helped to keep the competition close. At the very highest difficulty level, if a human player was leading the championship and was leading a specific race, the probability that they would suffer an event rose to 90% after they had been leading for 3 or more laps.

During testing, neither George nor I managed to win the championship at the highest level of difficulty, despite knowing the full details of the software code; at that level of difficulty, it was always one of the computer managed teams that won. We therefore thought that it would be quite a while before anyone claimed the prize offered by Clement, but we had not reckoned on how obsessive some of the players of "Formula 1" would be. CRL would get letters from people who had bought their games, and "Formula 1" got its share, which was a complete surprise to George & I. We had not expected such enthusiasm. CRL passed the 'fan' letters to us, and it was, mostly, really pleasant and flattering to hear from people who were getting so much enjoyment from what we had developed. We learned that groups of friends would spend incredibly long periods playing the game, not only overnight but sometimes over multiple days. On a few occasions, we received letters from the wives & girlfriends of some of these fans complaining about the amount of time their partners were spending playing, asking if we could somehow limit the playing time.

Clement was very much the entrepreneur and was happy to invest in interesting marketing, both pre-release and post-release. One of my workmates, Terry Pudwell, competed in the British Formula 3 championship and doing reasonably well. He was a Formula 3 lap record holder at Brands Hatch & a number of U.K. tracks, and he was a part-time instructor at the Silverstone racing school. Although Terry & I were in quite well-paid full-time employment, he needed sponsorship to be able to compete. As part of his marketing, Clement decided to sponsor Terry for a Formula 3 championship race on 13th October, 1985 at Silverstone, with Terry's car in CRL livery, a corporate hospitality tent on the inside of "Copse" bend and pit & garage passes during the Formula 3 race. George & I were invited with our families for an exciting day out, particularly standing on the Pit Wall during the F3

race. This event was attended by key members of Clement's CRL team, the winner of Clement's prize for winning the World Championship in the game and some people to whom Clement was promoting CRL games, not just "Formula 1".

George & I did not earn significant money from "Formula 1" but that was not our motivation anyway. The royalties did pay for all our Spectrum development equipment and contributed to a few Skiing holidays for us & our families. The feedback from the fans who played the game was the biggest reward and this stimulated to develop a third game, 'Endurance', based on endurance motorcycle racing.

We started development on this in early 1985. It was to be similar to "Formula 1" in being essentially a management motor sport game with a more "real-time" feel to it. While writing "Formula 1", I discovered that one could write code to run within the Z80 interrupt system and to connect this code to the main program code running normally. The Z80 interrupts on the Spectrum ran at 25 cycles per second and I put all the calculation code into modules to run within a single interrupt while the user interface & graphics ran normally. The impact of this on the player experience was that the game continued running even while one of the players was interacting with the game. It also meant that a race ran at about 25 times real time so that a 24-hour race, such as the Bol d'Or, would take about an hour or the Suzuka 8-hour race took about 20 minutes to play. This made for a

quite frenetic playing experience, particularly for multi-players. You could not go for a cup of coffee or ignore the game once a race had started. In May, I was posted to an assignment in Gothenburg, Sweden with my family; my daughter had been born in December 1984 and the demands of being a new father and working away from the U.K. generated a bit more pressure but nothing beyond reason.

George & I continued to send each other microdrives by post, which was quite good between the U.K. & Sweden; one each way about each week, usually dispatching on a Monday. At the end of August, George loaded up his Ferrari with his Spectrum kit and drove from Loughton through Belgium, Holland, Germany & Denmark to Gothenburg for a fortnight's visit so that we could thrash out a full version to show to Clement in September. Once again, release for Xmas was the key driving deadline. At the end of George's visit, we drove in convoy back to the U.K., retracing George's route to us.

Clement had some suggestions for minor changes and a few more bugs came to light, which needed correcting, some of which had to wait until I returned to Sweden. It was very tight, but we got a final production version to Clement in time for commercial production & release for Xmas. "Endurance" did not sell as many copies as "Formula 1", but it did gain its own coterie of fans, sufficient for George & I to start development of a fourth game.

It had become possible to directly link 2 Spectrums through the serial interface and George & I had been playing around with the possibilities of developing a game to use this. Our fourth game was to be a 1st World War land & air strategy game. The overall idea was to gain land territory by using your air force to provide intelligence to your land forces. Each player would have been able to choose to play different roles, changing as they wished during the game. The main roles would have been as the general in charge of their land forces, as the air commander in charge of the squadrons of planes, as a squadron leader over enemy territory directing the squadron and as an individual pilot. Dogfights between aircraft would be real-time interactive and also happening off-screen. We had developed the bare bones of the game, with a working peer-to-peer network of 2 Spectrums back to back, the basic strategy elements in place and George had developed the on-screen interactive pilot's view of a dog-fight that used data from my background code to show that view & my background code took input from George's graphic component to update what should be shown. The planes and the area maps were only block graphics at this stage, but we had a working proof of concept in place.

In December, I was posted to a new assignment in Lisbon, Portugal and we took a break from any development while I was settling in and over Xmas & New Year. With our families, George & I went on a skiing holiday, during which, over evening beers, we explored how we wanted to develop the new game. This was probably very boring to everyone else in our party, but no one explicitly complained.

When we got back to work in the new year, we restarted our project. Unfortunately, 2 major problems arose. Portugal at that time was the poorest in Western Europe and relatively under-developed, particularly with respect to infrastructure & services. The electricity supply to & in the house that I was renting was quite intermittent, often cutting out multiple times during any 24 hours. Sometimes it was the breakers in the house but at others it was external to the property. This made it really frustrating when writing code that could be lost at any moment due to a power cut, which also sometimes resulted in chewed up microdrives, losing not only the code on which I was working but also other code.

The second problem, which really was the death knell for the project, was the unreliability of the postal service between the U.K. & Portugal. 2-3 days was the worst delay between posting & receiving between Sweden & the U.K. For Portugal, at that time, it was indeterminate and, if one made multiple postings

over several days, it was not certain in what order they would be received. After about 6 weeks of no progress, George & I decided to shelve the project until I was in a more stable environment. We never resurrected it, even after I returned to the U.K.

The above is an outline of the development of the Formula 1 game, & others, by George Munday and me. We continued to play computer games, but this was increasingly on PCs or Macs. On an assignment for the MoD to the Aldermaston nuclear facility in the early 1990s, one of the employees there asked if I was the Peter Wheelhouse who had developed Formula 1, which I confirmed; he had been one of the fans who had written to CRL in the 80s.

On a later assignment to London Heathrow for the new Terminal 2 construction, a group of team members asked the same question. These however were too young to have been playing Spectrum games in the 1980s but were interested in retro games and had found some references to Formula 1 on the web.

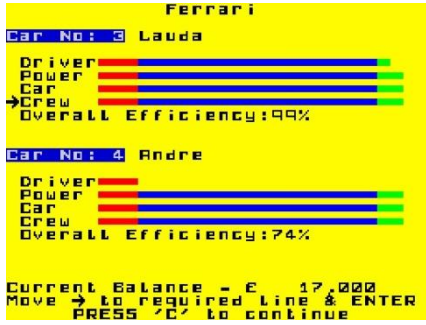
A few years ago, there was a Channel 4 TV programme about the 1980s, which featured very briefly Formula 1. This stimulated me to try to recreate the game as a web-based game. The beta version was hosted at www.petesretro.org.uk, but is no longer available. This was only a simple single player game, and I did consider further development to make it multi-player with different levels of difficulty but never finished it.

Peter Wheelhouse
28th March, 2024

Name: Formula One
Publishing company: CRL Group PLC (Clem Chambers)
Authors: George B. Munday, B. Peter Wheelhouse
Inlay art: Phil Gascoine
Release year: 1985
Genre: Sports management
Keys: Non-redefinable
Joystick: Kempston
Memory: 48K
Number of players: 6

There are two games that the British community devalues, including the press of the time, but that the Portuguese idolize. The first of them is Chuckie Egg, the game that deservedly won the Load ZX Museum's first Hall of Fame. The second is Formula One (from CRL), which was deservedly considered the best game in at least 2 polls from portuguese fans of the ZX Spectrum. It also appears in the Planeta Sinclair (the most known portuguese blog for all things Sinclair) top of the Best Games Ever for the ZX Spectrum, in position 23rd.

But there are more things that connect Formula One to Portugal. So, in the distant year of 1998, Nuno Pinto (aka "Namco") made a very competent MOD for the game.



And if you think that Formula One's connections to our country are exhausted here, we can also add that one of the programmers lived in Cascais after the game had been developed, and that, precisely on the day of the fanzine's launch, we have Peter Wheelhouse in Cantanhede, at the LOAD ZX Museum, in yet another initiative carried out by the Museum team, this time in partnership with Inercia: the SYNERGY event.

To be honest, we've never understood why the British critics don't properly value Formula One. Maybe it's because they don't have the concept of playing as a family like we had so ingrained in Portugal in the 80s (now, with the Internet and social media, unfortunately this concept was lost in most Portuguese homes). But in fact, Formula One is a game for family and friends, as it allows up to six players at the same time to take on the management of a Formula 1 team, not only by choosing sponsors (the first step, right after selecting one from six famous teams from the 80s), as well as the drivers (the most famous from the 84/85 season), but it is also possible to select

half a dozen inexperienced and unknown drivers, and you can even change their names (it's a good opportunity to put our names and those of our friends racing in the championship).

After this first phase, which only happens at the beginning of each season, we have access to one of the most important screens that precedes all races. We can then define the state and performance of the engine ("power"), the chassis ("car") and the efficiency of the mechanics ("crew"), which in practice translates into the speed at which they move when going around in the pits. In the configuration of the car there are some similarities with Brum Brum, a Portuguese game with the same theme of F1 management.

There is a fourth parameter that, at this stage, influences the course of the races: the driver level. But it is not possible to increase its performance in the same way as other parameters. Of course we can always buy a more experienced pilot, but this also costs more money and good management of funds is the first step to being successful.

The level of drivers increases as they finish the races, preferably in a high-scoring place (and hoping that they don't crash and get injured - if that happens, the only option left is to buy another driver, but fortunately this kind of incident is rare).

After defining the status of our vehicles, we have one last option to make before starting the race. Therefore, depending on the weather report provided, we have to choose the tyres with which we will appear on the starting grid. This option is very important, as a bad choice usually has disastrous results, from losing time, spinning and damaging the chassis, having to pit, or, in the worst case scenario, abandoning the race.

There are five tyre options to choose from:

- Soft Compound - the fastest, but they wear out quickly (suitable for cold temperatures)
- Medium Compound - less fast than the "soft" ones, but wear out less quickly
- Hard Compound - the slowest, but most durable (suitable for hot temperatures)
- Intermediates - for damp track
- Rain Tyres - for rainy weather.

The starting grid is then displayed and after a few seconds the race begins! Over the course of 16 Grand Prix, including Portugal (Estoril Circuit), we have the opportunity to see our drivers in action. The cars pass noisily with each lap, with the times of the first six posted on the electronic scoreboard. At the end of each lap, if something relevant happens, it is posted on the footer through a short message. This is how we know about problems that are happening to cars and drivers, as well as occasional changes in weather conditions. When the latter happens, it usually means that it has started to rain or that the track has now become dry. One way or another, the best thing is to call the car to the pits.

The pit mini-game is the one that no one forgets. We take control of the mechanic who has to change the tyres and, sometimes, go to the back of the car to tune the chassis or engine. It's the only arcade moment in Formula One, but it's also the one that causes the most chills. It's a race against time, and who has never uttered some insults, just because in their rush they made the mistake of missing the place where the tyre is changed? It's also the moment when we want to do everything perfectly, and our friends and family want our mechanic to put his foot down and miss the place he should touch. Meanwhile, the clock ticks down, increasing the nervousness of all parties even more. By one tyre you win, by one tyre you lose, even if it's because it took us a few seconds longer to change the wheel.

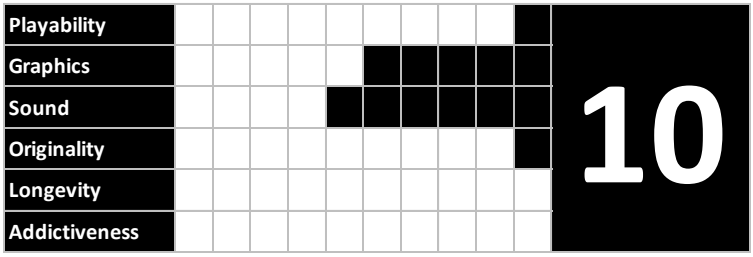
At the end of the race, the results are presented, as well as the points, both for the drivers and the team. If we reach the end of the 16 Grand Prix and our team

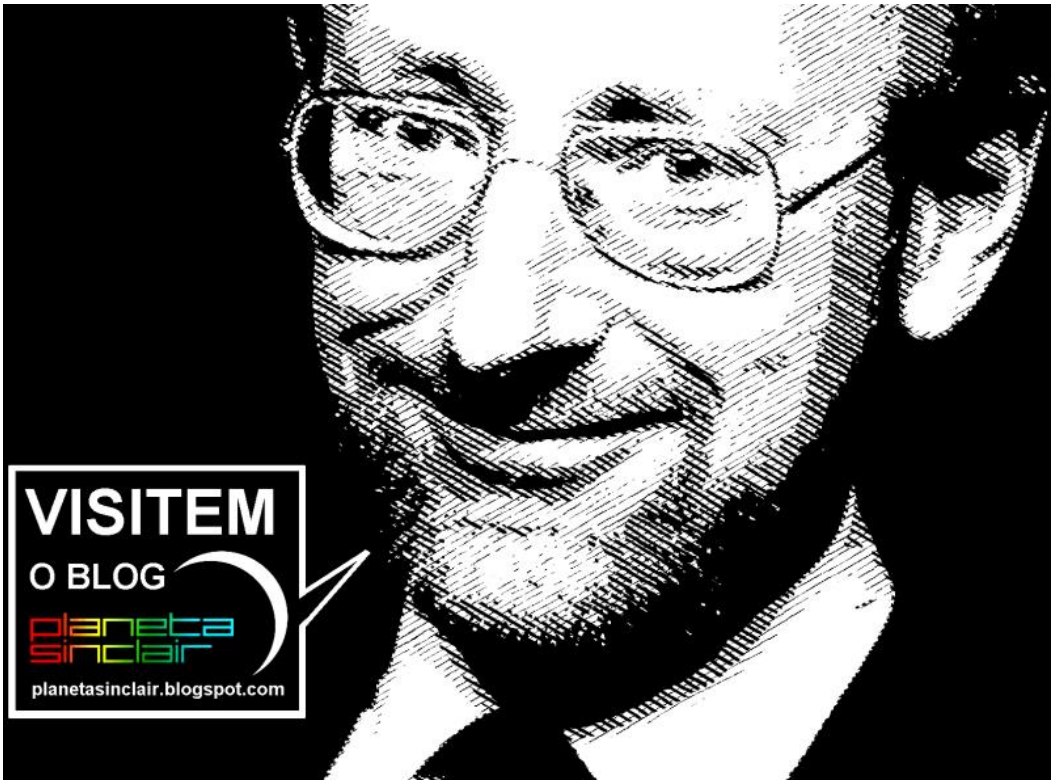
is the one with the most points, we start a new season, now at a higher level of difficulty (if playing solo). There are five difficulty levels, and in the most difficult ones, there are always 12 cars in the race (this does not happen in the easier levels) if we are playing solo. If we are playing with six human players, we start in the easier level in the first season. At the end of each season we can then progress to the next level, until we reach the top level (Expert).

Out of curiosity, when the game was released, the publisher CRL created a competition aimed at rewarding the first to win at the most advanced level (Expert), who received a special code for this achievement and had to send it by letter to the publisher. Soon there was news of champions, surprising the game's authors and CRL, as it took much less time than anticipated.

Finally, there is a lesser-known option in the game: betting. There is the possibility of betting on the winner before each race. It's a way to increase your piggy bank. This option was much more popular with the British public (not so much with the Portuguese, who were not so used to betting in the 80s). Press 'G' during the race, so you can bet before the next race.

Formula One is one of the most addictive games we know. Even after doing dozens and dozens of seasons, whether with family or alone, we always bring it back. It's the ideal game to spend an afternoon or evening with friends. I remember well the countless afternoons on family holidays, when instead of going to the beach, we couldn't tear ourselves away from the computer. These happy memories will always remain and, also because of this, I will never forget this game...

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